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AUTHOR McGrath, John N., III
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ABSTRACT

College students face a great deal of pressure which can lead to problems of a non-academic nature. This study examined where college students prefer to seek help with personal problems (n=113). Surveyed students rank ordered seven potential help sources with regard to nine different problem areas. The seven potential sources of help were: self, close friend, close relative, clergyman, counselor, faculty member, and staff member/advisor. The nine problem areas were: romantic relationships, family, friends, substance abuse, sexuality, depression, interpersonal relationships, self-understanding, and emotional stability. Students were also asked if they had previous counseling experience and whether it was helpful. Results showed that college students generally prefer to utilize the self or close friend for help with all problem areas. Counselors were generally ranked as the fourth choice. Previous counseling appeared to increase a student's tendency to prefer counseling again. Type of problem had an influence on whether or not a person would seek counseling form help. Gender did not have an effect on preference of counselor as a help source. Contains 24 references. (Author/JBJ)

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COLLEGE STUDENTS' HELP-SEEKING PREFERENCES FOR PERSONAL PROBLEMS

A thesis submitted to

The School of Education at

William Paterson College of New Jersey

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Education

in Counseling

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John N. McGrath III

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ABSTRACT

College students face a great deal of pressure and this can lead to problems of a non-academic nature. The purpose of this study was to examine where college students prefer to seek help with personal problems. A survey was distributed to 133 undergraduate students in a mid-sized state college in Northern New Jersey. 113 surveys were correctly filled out. The survey asked students to rank order seven potential help sources with regard to nine different problem areas. The Seven potential sources of help were: self, close friend, close relative, clergyman, counselor, faculty member, and staff member/advisor. The nine problem areas are: romantic relationships, family, friends, substance abuse, sexuality, depression, interpersonal relationships, self-understanding, and emotional stability. Students were also asked a few demographic questions. A last section asked if students had previous counseling experience and, if they did, was it helpful. The results showed that college students generally prefer to utilize the self or a close friend for help with all problem areas. After that came close relative. Counselor was generally ranked as the fourth choice for help. It appeared that previous counseling increased a student's tendency to prefer counseling again. It also appeared that the type of problem had an influence on whether or not a person would seek counseling for help. A person's sex did not have an effect on their preference of counselor as a help source. From these results it can be concluded that counselors should direct some of their resources toward the alternative sources of potential helpers. They should also make an effort to educate students about the benefits that counseling can provide.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

College students face a great deal of pressure brought about by the many changes and situations that arise as a result of attending an institution of higher education. In the case of a freshman, he/she may be coming straight out of high school, or after a number of years in the work force. A non-freshman may simply be returning from summer vacation to continue his/her studies. In any case, there are a number of changes that the student is going through. The stress of going back to school can be immense. In fact, college students are most likely to seek help through counseling just after the semester begins, and fall quarters are heaviest (Sharp & Kirk, 1974). When a student is faced with a problem of a personal nature, there are a number of different sources that the student can utilize to help him/herself. Almost all colleges and universities have some sort of counseling center or service that students can go to for help with non-academic problems; the question is whether or not these services are utilized. If, in fact, college students do not utilize their institution's counseling services, where do they turn for help?

In order to best address these questions, counseling centers should first examine the many factors involved in seeking counseling. Downey and Sinnett

(1980) found that not all students use mental health services with equal frequency. Counseling centers should determine the differences between those who seek counseling and those who do not (Palladino & Domino, 1978), as well as examine the different types of presenting problems. It may be determined that the type of problem has a direct influence on whether or not a student seeks counseling (Brown & Chambers, 1986). Carney and Barak (1976) have identified a number of different types of problems that a student may be dealing with: Drinking, drugs and smoking, sex related, living conditions and roommates, financial, choice of major or career, personal/religious values, leisure/recreation activities, academic, interpersonal skills, male/female relations, intrapersonal concerns, negotiating the system, and social stereotypes. There are many others that could be added to this list but this paper will focus on non-academic problems.

One should also look closely at whether or not seeking help through counseling is considered, by the student, as an acceptable way of dealing with a certain problem or problems. Even if a student considers counseling as a valuable source of assistance, this does not mean that the student will utilize that source (Carney, Savitz, & Weiskott, 1979). Examining perceptions of counseling and counseling services is extremely important if those providing these services hope to be of greatest help to the students.

Counseling centers are faced with the task of providing a service to students who may or may not utilize it. One cannot force a student to attend counseling so it becomes important to determine how best to intervene and help while still respecting the student's freedom and dignity. Many colleges and universities are now exploring the nature of student problems and the students' perceptions of the counseling centers. This is in response to external calls for accountability and a growing orientation toward a community mental health focus (Carney & Savitz, 1980). It has been observed, however, that despite the growing interest in students' help-seeking behavior, the "research in this area suffers from the lack of a systematic approach to the problem" (Tinsley, St. Aubin, & Brown, 1982).

While there are many different aspects to college students' help-seeking behavior, this study will more closely examine where a college student seeks help for non-academic problems or issues. I will also differentiate between types of problems to determine if a certain type of problem influences a person's help-seeking preference. Previous research has shown the most commonly listed personal concerns were those dealing with anxiety or stress, depression, self-esteem, relationship issues, and family problems (Silker, 1994). A survey will be conducted to determine where college students prefer to go for help for specific types of problems.

Statement of the Problem

Do college students seek counseling for non-academic problems? If not, where do they turn to for help? Given certain choices of help sources, where would they most prefer to go and where would they least prefer to go? Does previous counseling increase or decrease one's propensity to seek counseling again? What types of problems would lead someone to seek counseling? Are there differences between those who would seek counseling and those who would not? Most importantly, how can knowing students' help-seeking preference be used by college counseling centers to best help the students? The task is to provide help; the question is how to most effectively do this. It is hoped that we can infer where a student will seek help by learning whom they say they prefer to seek help from. Knowing where students go for help is the first step in determining the best way to help them.

Hypotheses

1. Counseling is not a preferred source of help for dealing with non-academic problems for most students.

2. Most students will turn to themselves or a close friend for help dealing with non-academic problems.

3. A previous counseling experience will increase a student's tendency to prefer

counseling again for help with non-academic problems.

4. The type of presenting problem has an influence on whether or not a person would prefer counseling.

5. A student's gender has an effect on his/her preference of counselor as a help source.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine college students' help-seeking preferences for non-academic problems. It is hoped that this information can provide counselors and counseling centers with a better understanding of where students seek help and for what types of problems they seek help. This can result in more effective distribution of counseling services and intervention.

Significance of the Problem

College students are generally underutilizing college counseling centers. Many of these students may become so overwhelmed that they fail academically, drop out of school, or worse. Counseling can be of great benefit to many of these students, but they have to be willing to utilize this resource. It is important that college counselors identify the preferred sources of help so that they know where to direct the limited resources they have. They must also make a concerted effort to educate the students on the benefits that counseling can provide. Counseling can

be extremely helpful in facing the difficulties that today's college student faces.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to a mid-sized state college in Northern New Jersey. 133 undergraduate students were given a survey at the beginning of their class period and it took roughly five to ten minutes to complete. Only the researcher distributed and collected the surveys.

Delimitations of the Study

This study was limited to one of many New Jersey State Colleges. Because of itsproximity to New York City, there are a number of other colleges in the area as well. There are a number of differences between the different New Jersey State Colleges as well as between the different colleges in the area. In addition, the small size of the sample comparative to the size of the college prevents the assumption that the conclusions can apply to all of the students at the college. Lastly, because this survey examined help-seeking preferences, actual help-seeking behavior cannot be determined definitively.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A good deal of research has examined the nature of college students' problems, their perceptions of counseling, and their help-seeking preferences. In the mid-seventies, a researcher who has studied this topic extensively found that educational/vocational concerns caused the greatest amount of pressure for university seniors (Carney & Barak, 1976). There were obviously personal problems to be dealt with, but they did not cause the greatest amount of stress. While it would seem that the times have gotten more stressful and complicated for college students, it does not appear that they are utilizing counseling to a greater degree for personal problems.

In a study that examined when college students would refer a friend for counseling, the issues that would most likely prompt this referral were pragmatic issues such as managing finances, career and job exploration, and scholastic difficulties (Carney & Savitz, 1980). In the same study, it was determined that faculty and students share a generally consistent view of student concerns, but faculty tend to overemphasize the importance of student academic issues while not

being as attuned to the students' nonacademic issues. There could be a number of reasons for this emphasis on counseling for pragmatic issues and not personal problems. Carney, Peterson, and Moberg (1990) felt that one possible explanation for this is that students continue to associate counseling with guidance counseling. For most people, their first encounter with the concept of counseling is with their high school guidance counselor. This may ingrain in them the idea that counseling is for academic and pragmatic issues, not personal ones. In the same study, Carney et al. also proposed that social desirability may play a role in this viewpoint. He felt that low social desirability may cause students to view themselves as less in need of traditional psychotherapy than of simple guidance in decision making.

There are other aspects of the presenting problem that influence whether or not a person would seek counseling. Watson and Ault (1983) identified three factors that come into play: Whether this is the initial occurrence of the problem or if it is recurrent, the severity of the problem, and whether the problem is resolved for the time or if it is currently happening. If a peer were experiencing recurrent, severe, or immediate problems, a student would be more likely to refer that peer to counseling. A study by Tinsley et al. (1982) also concluded that the type of problem influences a person's tendency to seek counseling.

In addition to the nature of the problem, the nature of the person seeking

counseling should be considered. In other words: what are the characteristics of a person who would seek counseling? Different studies have produced different results. Carney et al. (1979) studied students who seek counseling and found that those who were most receptive to counseling tended to be younger and undergraduate, have lower grade point averages, live on campus, and be black.

Conversely, another study showed that the average mental health client was older, a graduate student, married, in the college of arts and sciences, and tended to be employed (Downey & Sinnett, 1980). The researcher of the above mentioned study cautioned against concluding that this type of student had more problems than the average student; it could be that they are just more likely to seek help for their problems. This raises an important question: do people who seek counseling have more problems than the average student, or are they just more willing to turn to counseling for help with their problems? It is the opinion of this researcher that students who seek counseling do not differ substantially from students who do not with regard to the type and severity of their problems. I believe that certain students are simply more receptive to the idea of seeking counseling for their problems. It would be difficult to draw any conclusions, but some of the research has shown this to be true.

Palladino and Domino (1978) studied students in counseling using

personality tests and found that those in counseling did not differ substantially from their peers on basic personality dimensions, but did differ in the conscious recognition and reporting of personal problems. A person's gender has also been shown to be a determinant of whether an individual is likely to seek counseling Women are much more likely to seek counseling than men. Two thirds of all clients who seek psychological help are women and one in three women (versus one in seven men) will seek psychological help during her lifetime (Collier, 1982, as cited in Bernstein, Hoffman, & Wade, 1987). A study by Knapp and Edmiston (1982) found that women used the university counseling center significantly more than men. It would be a gross assumption indeed to conclude that women have more personal problems than men. It is probably more accurate to assume that women are more likely to seek outside help and men are more likely to deal with problems on their own or with a friend.

A study using the SCII General Occupational profiles of freshman students who sought counseling found that they had a high academic orientation and a high artistic and investigative orientation (Tyron, 1982). This could indicate that a student who seeks counseling may be more open to the kind of self-growth experience that counseling can provide. Past research also suggests that students who seek counseling differ from those who do not with regard to their

sophistication regarding counseling and the availability of alternative effective helpers. This suggests that the tendency to seek help is affected both by the type of problem and the potential help giver.

This brings us to another aspect of counseling that may have an influence on a student's tendency to utilize this resource for help with personal problems: the perception of counselors and counseling. Even something as subtle as the name of a college's counseling center can affect whether or not a student will utilize the services it provides. In one study, students' perceptions of a counseling center differed, based on the title of the center (Brown & Chambers, 1986). Their perceptions could influence whether or not they would utilize the center. A counselor's title also has an effect on a student's perception of the counselor. Gelso and Karl (1974) found that there were differences between the perceptions of college counselors and counseling psychologists, despite the fact that these titles are often used interchangeably. Henggeler, Harbin, and Sallis (1982) believed that this was a result of the low reputations of help sources that are staffed by mental health professionals. I would disagree, however, with this assumption because I do not believe that help sources that are staffed by mental health professionals have generally low reputations. Tinsley et al. (1982) found that students perceive potential help-givers differently and that this different perception influences whether

or not a student will utilize a particular source.

In addition to a counselor's title, people's perception of the attributes that accompany that title also affect their help-seeking behavior. In examining different types of counselors, Gelso and Karl (1974) found that a counseling psychologist had more positive attributes than a high school counselor and that a psychiatrist had a great deal more positive attributes than a counseling psychologist. It is probably safe to assume that the prestige that accompanies a particular title has a direct effect on a person's perception of the different attributes that they believe the titled person possesses. A "halo effect" occurs when a person has a more prestigious title. A study in 1984 showed a relatively positive evaluation of counselors. 83 % of the respondents agreed that counselors can be helpful with a variety of problems and 80% said they would be willing to seek counseling if they had a serious problem (Cook et al., 1984). It should be cautioned, however, that a person's willingness to seek help does not necessarily predict their actual help-seeking behavior. Just because a person says he or she would seek help does not mean he/she actually does. If this were the case, many more people would be seeking counseling than currently do. In one survey, 90% of the sample of college students were aware of the student services of guidance, counseling, and testing, but only 47% utilized those services (Lewicki & Thompson, 1982).

One possible reason for the reluctance to utilize counseling for help with personal problems is the idea that simply seeking counseling may be stigmatizing (Sibicky & Dovidio, 1984). American culture teaches people, especially men, to be strong and tough. To be vulnerable is to be weak and weakness is looked down on in this society. If a person cannot deal with a problem without turning to professional helpers, then that person is considered weak. Downey and Sinnett (1980) believed that when one identifies oneself as a patient versus a client, the stigma associated with that label may prevent the person from seeking help at all. The assumption is that people do not want to be known as a "patient" because a "patient" is someone with a sickness.

Even labeling oneself as a "client" in counseling can be stigmatizing. A fascinating study revealed the many negative attitudes toward a person who is believed to be a client in therapy. In the experiment, subjects were told that other subjects they were going to interview were either a client in counseling or were not. None of the people being interviewed were actually in counseling so the only difference was whether or not the interviewer thought the interviewee was a client. The interviewer and the interviewee were then asked to evaluate the experience:

> "As predicted...analyses revealed that perceivers formed more negative initial impressions of 'client' targets than of 'non-client' targets. 'Client' targets, compared to 'non-client' targets, reported in their evaluations of the

> conversations that they felt less comfortable, that they enjoyed the conversation less, that the perceiver formed a less accurate impression of them, and that they were treated in an atypical manner. Thus, one practical implication of the present research involves the public's attitudes and behaviors towards persons who utilize out-patient forms of mental health services." (Sibicky & Dovidio, 1984)

As the above study shows, the stigma that accompanies being perceived as a client can make it very difficult for a person to be willing to seek help through counseling.

A study by Parish and Kappes (1979) examined people who had been in therapy. He found that an individual's educational opportunities, self-concepts, and future ability to secure employment were negatively affected and concluded that people's attitudes are generally very negative toward anyone who seeks psychological services. It did not even matter whether or not the person was perceived as a client, patient or a typical person. It was simply the behavior of seeking counseling that was perceived negatively.

Social desirability has a strong influence on students' willingness to seek counseling. When students were asked about their own personal concerns versus the concerns of their peers, Carney and Savitz (1980) found that students were more likely to give socially acceptable responses to inquiries about their own concerns than to inquiries about the concerns of their peers. This might indicate that students are aware of the many problems and concerns that they and their peers

experience, but would rather not publicly acknowledge these problems within themselves.

Despite the stigma that comes with seeking help through counseling, research has shown that there are many people who evaluate counselors and counseling positively. Cook et al. (1984) found that attitudes about counseling were generally favorable and that women tended to view counseling more positively than men. He also found that, as was noted before, women were more willing to seek counseling than men.

It appears that one of the factors that most greatly influences a student's perception of counseling is previous experience with counseling. A study by Silker (1994) found that students who had been in counseling felt that it helped them academically and may have been a contributing factor in their ability to stay in school. Likewise, Knapp and Edmiston (1982) found that students who had been in counseling expressed the highest levels of satisfaction with school. Students also have the ability to understand the appropriateness of the counseling center's services for more severe, recurrent, on-going problems. A study by Watson and Ault (1983) had students rate the appropriateness of utilizing the counseling center for different types of problems. The lowest ratings occurred for the problems of least importance and the authors felt that this suggested that students do recognize

the importance of seeking counseling when problems are more severe.

There are still, however, many who will not or do not utilize counseling services for personal problems. One study showed that 64% of the subjects believe they would deal with a personal concern themselves rather than see a professional counselor (Tinsley et al., 1982). Researchers must closely examine why this may be so that they can get a better understanding of the obstacles which prevent a person from seeking counseling. One illuminating study revealed that, before going to a counseling center, some students often consulted as many as six or seven alternative help-givers (Christensen, Birk, Brooks, & Sedlacek, 1976). The researchers felt that this indicated that students have more trust in their peers than professionals. They pointed out, however, that since they ended up at the counseling center, this may suggest that peers do not have the skills to successfully resolve problems.

Another study that examined the different help sources to which a student would refer a peer found that students may feel that the personal problems of their peers are more appropriately solved through informal networks and that professional helpers are more appropriate for vocational-academic problems. This may be because students feel that anyone can provide help for personal problems, but vocational-academic problems require specialized information (Carney &

Savitz, 1980).

Familiarity with the help-giver may also be an important factor. Cook et al. (1984) found that roughly one-third of the subjects studied would not want to discuss personal problems with a stranger. The researchers also found that the subjects would not even know where to go for counseling. A similar study showed that the majority of students were not aware of existing university services. The researchers felt this was consistent with findings that showed that students are more likely to seek help from non-professionals (Henggeler et al., 1982). It's very likely that a person's lack of awareness of professional help sources is a result of their belief that personal problems can be dealt with using a number of alternative help-sources. Counselor gender may also be a factor. Bernstein et al. (1987) found that, depending on the nature of the concern, between 53% and 70% of his subjects had clear preferences for counselor gender. It would be safe to assume that a person would rather talk to someone of their own gender about certain gender-sensitive issues. Also, one can feel more of an identification with someone of the same gender and this can increase his/her willingness to be more open.

An important question now arises: If a student does not seek counseling for help with personal problems, where does that student go for help? This is the primary purpose of this paper and there has been a good deal of previous research

addressing this question. Carney and Barak (1976) found that the majority of seniors in his study relied on their own adaptive skills, family, and friendship networks to cope with the stresses of student life. For the most part they used non-professional sources. Another study showed that, for personal concerns, students would turn to a student friend first, an older friend second, and parents third (Christensen & Magoon, 1974). The same researcher, in a later study, again found the parents to be highly preferred as a source of help and he felt that this confirmed the need for counseling centers to make themselves and their services known both on and off the campus (Christensen et al., 1976).

One very important consideration in examining different help sources is the use of the self in coping with problems. While many people turn to outside sources for help with problems, there are many who would prefer to rely on themselves to deal with personal issues and concerns. Research has shown this to be true in many situations. A study by Cimbolic, Thompson, and Wald (1981) found that those students who chose not to seek help through a counseling center preferred to solve their own problems rather to take them to some outside source of help. Cook et al. (1984) also found that students prefer to rely on themselves for coping with personal problems. They also found that friends and relatives were the second most preferred source of help. They concluded that students tended to be conservative in

their choice of potential help givers, relying on themselves or friends and relatives before turning to professionals.

Tinsley et al. (1982) also found that a close friend or a close relative was the top ranked source of help for students and that they were much less likely to turn to an instructor or academic advisor than to a professional counselor. It is therefore important that students understand the difference between academic counseling and personal counseling. If a student associates the concept of counseling strictly with academic counseling, which we have shown to often be the case, they may fail to utilize the counseling center for help with their personal problems. One study that ranked professional help sources found that students tended to choose the campus ministries as their primary help source, with the counseling center and psychology clinic as distant second choices (Clifton, Weissberg, & Wood, 1979).

It would appear from my survey of relevant research, that a college's counseling center is not one of the preferred choices for help with personal problems. Since providing help is the purpose of these centers, it is important to determine the alternative help sources that a student utilizes. They can then work with these sources to get the help to the students who might otherwise not benefit from the counseling center's resources. Watson and Ault (1983) felt that since most students turn to friends first, it is important to explore the subsequent referrals that

those friends provide. Counseling services can be extremely helpful for personal problems, but they have to be utilized in order for them to be of any benefit to those who need them. This is the task that college counseling centers have before them.

Chapter 3

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Procedures

This study was conducted at a midsized (roughly 8,000 full-time students) state college in Northern New Jersey. The study was conducted in order to fulfill the requirements for a degree of Master of Education in counseling. Previous research provided input in the design of the survey. Tinsley et al. (1982) felt that research on help-seeking behavior should examine three important factors: the different nature of personal problems, the different potential helpers available to the client, and the ways that clients who seek counseling differ from those who do not . The survey was designed with the first two factors in mind. The third factor is briefly examined by the use of a few demographic questions (sex, previous counseling experience, class rank, and school of study).

Seven potential sources of help were chosen by examining the previous research and by my own determination of the most prevalent sources available to a college student. These seven are: the self, a close friend, a close relative, a clergyman, a counselor, a faculty member, and a staff member/advisor. It is

believed that these seven cover the most common sources of help a student may utilize. An additional source may have been God, but it would then be hard to differentiate between that as a self-help source or a source similar to that of clergyman. Another additional source that was recommended was self-help sources such as books or audiotapes. This fell under the category of self-help, so it is assumed that people who may utilize these sources are still relying on themselves to deal with a problem.

The nine problem areas were chosen in much the same way as the seven sources of help. Previous research used a number of these problem areas and I was able to combine some and eliminate others to come up with nine areas that cover a broad spectrum of personal problems. The nine areas are: problems with romantic relationships, problems with family, problems with friends, problems with substance abuse, problems with sexuality, problems with depression, problems with interpersonal relationships, problems with self-understanding, and problems with emotional stability.

Considering the recommendation of Tinsley et al. (1982), I decided that ranking potential help-givers was better than having them rated on something like a Likert scale. They found that respondents frequently tended to rate all potential help givers close to the middle of the scale.

Christensen and Magoon (1974) also felt that establishing a hierarchy of potential help sources with regard to specific problems was important. The factors that they felt influenced help-seeking behavior were the sex of the student, the student's previous counseling experience, and the type of presenting problem. These three factors were incorporated into the design of the survey. The survey is included in appendix A.

Subjects

A total of 133 students was given the survey to fill out. 20 of the surveys were filled out incorrectly or incompletely and had to be discarded. This yielded a total sample of 113. Of this sample, 65 were female and 48 were male. Of the total sample, 8 were freshmen, 21 were sophomores, 34 were juniors, and 50 were seniors. The student's school of study was also surveyed and of the total sample 19 were in the School of Arts and Communication, 32 were in the School of Education, 45 were in the School of Humanities. Management, and Social Sciences, 11 were in the School of Science and Health, and 6 were undeclared. Lastly, of the total sample, 36 had previously sought counseling for personal issues or concerns. All students were selected by randomly approaching professors in the different schools of study and asking if the survey could be distributed in their classroom.

Data Sources and Collection

The majority of ideas for designing the survey came from previous research by Tinsley et al. (1982), Christensen and Magoon (1974), and Carney and Barak (1976). Additional input was provided by Dr. S. Sigmon (personal communication, March 29, 1995). The type of personal problem and the sources of potential help were ultimately chosen by this researcher.

Treatment and Instruments Used for Data Collection

The surveys were distributed by this researcher going into different classrooms at the beginning of the scheduled class time and requesting the students' participation in this research. It was made clear that participation was voluntary and that the survey would take about 5 to 10 minutes to complete. No student declined to fill out the survey.

It was explained that the survey was designed to examine college students' help-seeking preferences. The instructions on the survey were read aloud and then it was distributed to the students. I stayed with the students during the filling out of the surveys so that I might answer any questions. A small number of students asked for clarification on certain instructions. For the most part, it appeared that the students understood what they were doing. When completed, the surveys were

collected by me and any final questions were answered.

Chapter 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This survey contained three sections. The first section contained three questions that sought to gather demographic data about the student. The first question asked for the students' class rank (freshman, sophomore, etc.). The second question asked the student to list his/her school of study (School of Arts and Communication, School of Education, etc.). The last question asked the sex of the student.

The second section was the bulk of the survey. This section looked at 9 potential problem areas that a student may have to deal with and 7 potential sources of help that he/she may utilize in dealing with these problems. Regarding each problem area, the student was asked to rank order the seven potential sources of help in dealing with that problem area. A ranking of 1 would be the first place that a student would go for help and a ranking of 7 would be the last place a student would go for help. The average ranking of each help source in each problem area is contained in table 1.

The last section contained 2 questions. Question 1 asked if the student had

ever previously sought counseling for personal issues or concerns and question 2 asked if those who had previously sought counseling found it helpful. The first question in the last section was used to analyze the differences in rankings of those who had sought counseling to those who had not. This question was also used to determine if there were any gender differences in the previous counseling experience of the students. The second question in the last section simply sought to determine if those who had previously sought counseling found it to be helpful. This last section information is contained in tables 2 and 3.

The average ranking for counselor was also broken down into two separate scores. One score reflected the average ranking provided by those who had previously sought counseling and the other score reflected the average ranking provided by those who had not previously sought counseling. It was believed that those who had previously sought counseling would rate counselors higher than those who had not. These rankings and the differences between them are contained in table 4. It was also believed that females would rank counselors higher than males. Average overall ranking of counselor for males and females is contained in table 5.

Table 6 contains the percentages of students who ranked each help source as either their first or second choice in a particular problem area. Table 7 contains the

percentages of students who ranked each help source as either their second to last or last choice in a particular problem area.

Table 1

Average rankings of 7 potential sources of help across 9 problem areas.
(1=first place they would go for help, 7=last place they would go for help)

Problem	Source of Help						
	Self	Close Friend	Close Relative	Clergyman	Counselor	Faculty Member	Staff Member/Advisor
1) Romantic Relationships	1.80	1.81	3.02	6.15	4.48	5.33	5.28
2) Family	2.01	1.95	2.73	5.29	4.37	5.45	5.45
3) Friends	1.80	2.27	2.79	6.04	4.40	5.30	5.40
4) Substance Abuse	2.88	2.06	2.99	6.00	3.60	5.27	5.20
5) Sexuality	1.82	1.93	3.44	6.03	3.97	5.33	5.39
6) Depression	2.34	2.05	2.98	5.80	3.81	5.37	5.42
7) Interpersonal Relationships	1.95	1.95	2.93	6.08	4.26	5.83	5.40
8) Self-Understanding	2.03	2.25	3.00	5.81	4.04	5.28	5.40
9) Emotional Stability	2.31	2.04	2.81	5.83	3.98	6.00	5.49
Total Average Ranking	2.10	2.03	2.97	5.96	4.10	5.46	5.38

The following results show that students generally look to themselves or a

close friend for help in almost all problem areas. After that they will turn to a close relative for help. On average, the counselor was ranked as the student's fourth choice for help. The highest ranking the counselor received was for the problem of substance abuse. The counselor's ranking was a 3.6 which was still behind the rankings for self, close friend, and close relative which were 2.88, 2.06, and 2.99 respectively. These findings support the first and second hypotheses. The highest ranking that the students gave for self was with the problem areas of romantic relationships, friends, and sexuality. The lowest ranking for self was in the problem area of substance abuse. This indicates that students may recognize the need for external help when it comes to the problem of substance abuse. This supports the fourth hypothesis.

Faculty member and staff member/advisor were ranked equally, with average scores of 5.46 and 5.38 respectively. Of particular interest to this researcher was the low ranking of clergyman, which was roughly a 6. Students consistently chose clergyman as the last place they would go for help.

Table 2

Percentage of students who previously sought counseling.

	Male	Female	Total
Yes	27	35	32
No	73	65	68

Table 3

Percentage of those with previous counseling experience who found it helpful.

	Male	Female	Total
Helpful	77	83	81
Not helpful	23	17	19

The following results show that roughly one-third of the students had previous counseling experience. Females were more likely to have previous counseling experience than males. Of those who had previous counseling experience, roughly four-fifths found the experience helpful, with females rating it as helpful slightly more often than males.

Table 4

Average counselor ratings for those with previous counseling experience compared to those without previous counseling experience.

Problem Area	Previous Experience	No Previous Experience	Difference
Romantic Relationships	4.16	4.79	.63
Family	4.05	4.69	.64
Friends	4.08	4.71	.63
Substance Abuse	3.19	4.01	.82
Sexuality	3.72	4.22	.50
Depression	3.28	4.35	1.07
Interpersonal Relationships	3.89	4.62	.73
Self Understanding	3.64	4.43	.79
Emotional Stability	3.56	4.40	.84

While the statistical significance of the differences were not analyzed, it is clear that students with previous counseling experience consistently rate counselors higher than those without previous counseling experience in all the problem areas. The differences range from half a point for sexuality to slightly over a point for depression. These findings would appear to support the third hypotheses.

Table 5

Average overall ranking of counselors for males and females.

	Males	Females
Average Ranking	4.21	4.17

These results show that there was very little difference in the rankings for counselor between males and females. This finding was inconsistent with previous research which has shown that women are more likely to seek counseling than men (Knapp, 1982).

Table 6

Percentage of students who ranked each help source as either their first or second choice.

Problem	Source Of Help						
	Self	Close Friend	Close Relative	Clergyman	Counselor	Faculty Member	Staff Member/Advisor
1) Romantic Relationships	39	45	13	0	1	0	0
2) Family	35	36	25	1	1	0	0
3) Friends	41	37	19	0	1	0	0
4) Substance Abuse	28	37	21	0	11	2	1
5) Sexuality	41	41	11	1	4	0	0
6) Depression	31	37	21	1	7	1	0
7) Interpersonal Relationships	37	38	20	0	4	0	0
8) Self-Understanding	38	31	20	2	7	0	0
9) Emotional Stability	30	36	25	2	6	0	0

These findings show that a counselor was very rarely ranked as the first or second choice for help. The highest percentage was for substance abuse with eleven percent of the students rating counselor as their first or second choice for

help. The lowest percentage was for romantic relationships, family, and friends with only one percent rating counselor as their first or second choice for help. Percentages do not add up to one hundred because of rounding off.

Table 7

Percentage of students who ranked each help source as either their second to last or last choice.

Problem	Source of Help						
	Self	Close Friend	Close Relative	Clergyman	Counselor	Faculty Member	Staff Member/Advisor
1)Romantic Relationships	0	0	5	36	11	24	22
2) Family	0	0	4	35	11	23	26
3) Friends	0	3	4	36	12	21	24
4) Substance Abuse	7	0	5	33	7	25	22
5) Sexuality	2	0	7	36	7	21	25
6) Depression	4	0	6	30	8	26	26
7) Interpersonal Relationships	2	0	4	36	9	23	24
8) Self-Understanding	3	2	5	31	9	25	25
9) Emotional Stability	3	0	5	33	8	23	3

These findings show that roughly ten percent of the students chose counselor as their second to last or last choice for help. An encouraging sign is that seven percent of the students would not rely on themselves for help with substance abuse. If they do not go to a counselor, at least they are turning to outside help for this problem. Percentage points do not add up to one hundred because of rounding off. These last two tables support the first and second hypotheses.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Problem Restatement

This study was conducted to examine college students' help-seeking preferences. Through the use of a survey it was hoped to determine where college students prefer to turn for help with non-academic problems.

Description of Methods and Procedures Used

A survey was used to gather information on college students' help-seeking preferences. The survey consisted of three parts. Part one consisted of a few demographic questions. Part two comprised the bulk of the survey. In this section, students were asked to rank order seven potential help sources in nine different problem areas. The last section of the survey consisted of two questions which asked if a student had previous counseling experience and, if so, was that experience helpful. The survey was distributed by randomly choosing professors and asking if the survey could be handed out at the beginning of class. A total of 133 students participated and 20 of the surveys were filled out incompletely or incorrectly which yielded a total sample of 113 students. The survey took roughly 5

- 10 minutes and was collected by the researcher when it was completed.

Findings

The results obtained in this research supported 4 of the 5 hypotheses. The results showed that, for most students, counseling is not a preferred source of help for dealing with non-academic problems. It was also shown that most students will turn to themselves or a close friend for help with non-academic problems. It appeared that a previous counseling experience will increase a student's tendency to prefer counseling again for help with non-academic problems, but this was not shown conclusively. It also appeared that the type of presenting problem has an influence on whether or not a person would prefer counseling. The results did not show, however, that a person's sex has an effect on his/her preference of counselor as a help source.

In analyzing the data, it was shown that the average ranking for counselor was 4.1. In none of the problem areas was the counselor ranked ahead of self, close friend, or close relative. Self and close friend were the preferred choices for help with personal problems, with close relative next. Faculty member and staff member/advisor were ranked equally after counselor. The last place the students would prefer to go for help was clergyman.

Roughly one-third of the students had previous counseling experience with

females being slightly more likely to have the experience than males. Roughly 4 out of 5 of those who had previous counseling experience found it helpful. Previous experience in counseling also appeared to increase the counselor's ranking anywhere from half a point to a little over one point. Males and females tended to rank counselors equally.

Conclusions

Based on this research, it can be concluded that college students prefer to rely on themselves or a close friend for help with personal problems. It would seem that counselors are not a preferred source of help. There are many implications to these findings. It may be that counselors are not seen as very helpful. There could also be the social stigma attached to seeking help through counseling. It could also be that the United States culture places a heavy emphasis on strength and that seeking a professional source of help for problems would be a sign of weakness. Anectdotally, a number of students scrawled comments on their survey to indicate that they would never go to a counselor for help with personal problems. This survey did not examine the reasons students do not seek counseling, it examined their preferences for help sources.

A possible flaw in the survey was noted by the researcher during analysis of the findings. The respondents were asked to rank order the sources of help with 1

being the first place they would go for help and 7 being the last place they would go for help. This should not have been worded that way since some students may have interpreted the phrase as asking to describe their actual behavior rather than their preference. It should have said that 1 would be the first place they would **prefer** to go for help and 7 would be the last place they would **prefer** to go for help. Where a student says he/she would go for help may be different from where they would prefer to go for help. This may just be semantics but it is important to note.

The question now arises as to how better to provide counseling services to the students. If the students would generally prefer not to seek counseling, how can counselors provide the help that may truly be needed? One way posed by Cimbolic et al. (1981) is to provide the preferred sources of help (the self or close friend) with instruction on problem-solving and help-providing. Students could learn how to better cope with personal problems and a network of peer helpers can also be developed to assist students with the helping process. Tinsleyet al. (1982) also felt that counselors should provide assistance and consultation to friends and relatives so that these potential help sources can be better equipped to assist those who need help. Other research supports this notion of training students and their peers in help-giving behaviors (Christensen & Magoon, 1974; Carney & Barak, 1976).

The perceptions of counseling and counseling centers should also be

considered. If students are better educated about the benefits of counseling, they may be more likely to utilize counselors as a source of help (Cook et al., 1984; Parish & Kappes, 1979). Even something as simple as the titles of the counseling center's staff can have an impact on a student's perception of counseling. Gelso and Karl (1974) found that counselors should inform the public that they are counseling psychologists or clinical psychologists when appropriate. These titles generally elicit more favorable perceptions of the counselors.

Because this research showed that students are more likely to utilize counseling for help with substance abuse problems, the counseling centers could concentrate their resources on "marketing" their potential benefits to those struggling with this issue. While it is the opinion of this researcher that counseling can be beneficial for a myriad of personal problems, it is helpful to learn the specific problems that would make a student more prone to seek counseling.

Aside from the possible flaw noted previously, I feel that the survey was very helpful and informative. I would have liked to do a much more in-depth statistical analysis of the data, but time constraints prevented that. A good deal of information was provided by this survey, but a number of questions have arisen. The information on a student's school of study was collected in order to possibly get a cross-section of the general student body. While it did not appear that a student's

school of study had any effect on his/her help-seeking preferences, I would have liked to analyze any possible influence that this factor may have had. Again, time constraints prevented that.

In conclusion, I believe that counselors have a formidable task in providing services to a student body that would not likely utilize those services. Alternative ways of providing help must be examined. Peer helpers and instruction in coping skills are two of the ways counseling centers can provide the students with assistance. Counseling centers should also be aware of the different types of problems that would make a student more or less likely to utilize their services. Lastly, it is important for counseling centers to educate the public about the potential benefits of counseling. As long as students perceive counseling as unhelpful or undesirable, it will be difficult to provide them with the services they may really need. While the scope of this study was limited to a small sample in one mid-sized school, I believe the information to be important. Further studies of this type should be conducted to get a more complete picture of the situation.

Recommendations for Additional Studies

1. A study to examine possible sex differences in college student's help-seeking preferences. The findings in this study were not completely conclusive.
2. A study to examine more closely the characteristics of those who do seek

counseling and how they differ from those who do not seek counseling.

3. A study to examine the possible reasons that a person would or would not seek counseling.

4. A study to examine college students' perception of counseling and counseling centers.

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Appendix A

CLASS RANK Freshman____ Sophomore____ Junior____ Senior____

SCHOOL OF Undeclared____ Arts + Communication____ Education____

Humanities, Management and Social Sciences____ Science + Health____

SEX Male____ Female____

Below are nine areas in which people may experience problems. Listed are seven possible sources of help for coping with these problems. For each problem area, rank order the sources of help from 1 to 7 with **1 being the first place** you would go for help with that problem and **7 being the last place** you would go for help with that problem. Your responses will be kept totally confidential. Thank you for your participation.

PROBLEM **SOURCE OF HELP**

	Self	**Close Friend**	**Close Relative**	**Clergyman**	**Counselor**	**Faculty Member**	**Staff Member/ Advisor**
1) Romantic Relationships							
2) Family							
3) Friends							
4) Substance Abuse							
5) Sexuality							
6) Depression							
7) Interpersonal Relationships							
8) Self - Understanding							
9) Emotional Stability							

Have you ever previously sought counseling for personal issues or concerns? Yes____ No____

If yes to the previous question, did you find the counseling helpful Yes____ No____